

リーディング教材の妥当性 —「大草原の小さな家」と「チャーリーとチョコレート工場」 を比較して—

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(2015年11月20日受理)

On the Appropriateness of Reading Materials —A Comparison of *Little House on the Prairie* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*—

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(Received November 20th, 2015)

要 旨

この論文では、「大草原の小さな家」と「チャーリーとチョコレート工場」という二つの小説を日本の外国語教育に取り入れる際の問題点について考察する。

「大草原の小さな家」は、19世紀のアメリカ中西部を舞台に、インガル一家がウィスコンシンからカンザスへ移動する際の様々な出来事を描いている。日本人学生にとってのこの作品の難しさは、当時の生活に関する英語の語彙、高校までに教えられていない熟語や擬声語の多さである。特に、アメリカの昔の生活や、日本文化とは異なる文化的語彙の多さのために、小説の理解が難しくなってしまうのである。

次に、「チャーリーとチョコレート工場」は、現代を舞台にした空想小説であるので、「大草原の小さな家」のような文化的語彙の多さから生じる難しさはあまり無いが、高校までに教えられていない語彙、熟語、抽象概念のために理解が難しい部分はある。

最後に、この二つの教材の中で、どちらが日本の外国語教育で妥当であるかを、筆者達の実践例から示した。

1. The Importance of Reading

Krashen (1988, 2009) reiterates what experts have been saying all along: that reading is neces-

sary to language building. Not only does it give students of any language an authentic example of how the vocabulary and grammar learnt in the classroom can be used outside of the classroom,

but it also can increase motivation if seen as a pleasurable activity. As Gardner (2006) states, motivation is a key to becoming proficient in English. Dornyei (2006) even goes so far as to say that no matter how good a student may be, they will not improve their language skills if they are not motivated to try to improve them.

Kelly (2002) mentions the difficulty of finding suitable authentic material that is of interest to Japanese students in the EFL classroom. He lauds the importance of authentic materials of quality, but explains that the bulk of authentic material suitable for college-age students lies beyond the ability of most students. Consequently, most teachers rely on textbooks heavily padded with translations, or textbooks containing scripts adapted for the classroom.

In this study, the authors wish to inspect the two novels *Little House on the Prairie* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Both are popular novels unabridged for English learners, and therefore can be considered authentic material.

2. On Choosing the Texts

Two books were chosen to be studied as part of the Reading subject for 2nd year students at Gifu Women's University. One novel was written by the American, Laura Ingalls Wilder, while the other was written by the famous British children's writer, Roald Dahl.

Of the eight students who attended the class, as many as five were from the Primary Education Department. The remainder was from the Tourism Department. Due to the fact that the majority of the students attending such a class are from the Primary Education Department, it was decided that children's books would prove more benefi-

cial for the students.

As both have children as the main protagonists, both are classified as Children's Literature. Although *Little House on the Prairie* follows Laura Ingalls' childhood years, the novel is generally considered to be fiction rather than autobiographical. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is one of Dahl's fantasy masterpieces.

Little House on the Prairie was chosen for its historical content. The book shows in detail the harsh life of the early pioneers, especially those who braved the prairies and tried to build their homes on the vast planes, usually quite far from town and other social luxuries.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, on the other hand, was chosen for its popularity in both its original language and its translated version. The film by the same name was also a big success in Japan, thus leading the authors to suspect that all of the students would have some background knowledge of the story. As Davies (1995) advises, having some background knowledge of the topic facilitates understanding, so the authors expected the students to be quite motivated to try to read the novel in the original.

3. Peculiarities of *Little House on the Prairie*

This is the second book in the Little House series to mention the Ingalls family, and records events that took place from 1869 to 1870. The first chapters describe leaving Pepin, Wisconsin, and the journey to Independence, Kansas. It then goes on to describing how the author's father built the family a new log home, and how the Indians came to visit them, along with many other happenings that the young pioneering family ex-

perienced.

When looking at the novel from a historical point of view, the first thing that one notices is the rich description of traditional American culture. Set almost 150 years ago, this is indeed an excellent text for students wanting to know about the gradual expansion of America, the trials and tribulations of the early settlers, and the friction between those early homesteaders and the Indians whose land they tried to commandeer. As the protagonist is a child, who invariably sees the world through pure, innocent eyes, even everyday chores such as washing clothes become exciting events. Wilder's descriptions of domestic bliss, friendly neighbors, cultivation of the open, previously-uncultivated terrain, and the attempt to adjust to people with differing customs with whom they shared the land are quite interesting. It is little wonder that the book is still on the Required Reading list for eight-to-ten year olds in the United States¹. Some school districts have even developed teaching guides and internet sites dedicated to the Little House series.

However, from a linguistic point, the text contains various stumbling blocks for the EFL student. First, there is the problem of vocabulary. Because the Ingalls family travels by horse and wagon, there are a number of words describing the horses, their harnesses and other equipment, as well as their actions. The vocabulary is not only unfamiliar, but, due to the traditional Japanese culture not using horses in the same way as in America, also culturally alien. Without a background, the specific jargon used is beyond most EFL students with only a background in junior and senior high school English.

Similar to the predicament of vocabulary is the use of idioms and onomatopoeia not taught in the

Japanese high school English curriculum. Such terms as "hang the expense" and "scolded like anything" are completely strange, as is "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it." Words describing sound can be particularly difficult for the so-called non-native, while their inclusion into a novel directed at children is essential for the so-called native children reading it. Words such as "thud", "splash", "throb", "crunch", and "glitter" are only taught in Japan if they happen to appear in a story in a senior high text book.

Along with these, one can add abstract concepts such as the following scene depicting the morning of the young Ingalls family's departure from their home in the woods of Wisconsin: "through the grey woods came lanterns with wagons and horses, bringing Grandma and Grandpa" which is supposed to inspire the idea of lanterns (first seen) dangling from buggies (second seen) carrying relatives (third seen) through the still dark early morning of late winter.

A TV movie of the same name was made in 1974, and was soon followed by a television drama series which ran for nine seasons. Of course, none of the present students had seen any episodes prior to a short viewing in class, and, unfortunately, few found the drama especially interesting.

4. Peculiarities of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

According to BBC's education correspondent, Sean Coughlan, Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* tops the list of children's books to be read before leaving primary school; a list prepared by 500 teachers for the National Association for the Teaching of English. The book is

one of many books by Dahl that continues to entertain children all over the world, including Japan. It has also been made into a movie, the more modern version already viewed by most of the Reading class.

Being a fantasy, this novel does not offer the student any specific historical information, although it does offer some cultural information, mostly in the descriptions of the main protagonist's poor family situation. However, in terms of readability, it offers the EFL learner a softer entry, although some of the language further on in the book is still beyond the capacity of most young Japanese college students. For example, the first three pages of the book introduce the Bucket family; first, both sets of grandparents, followed by Mr. and Mrs. Bucket, and then finally, Charlie Bucket. Page 3 ends with:

"How d' you do? And how d' you do? And how d' you do again? / He is pleased to meet you."

Of course, this type of greeting is learnt in the very early stages of EFL tuition, and therefore is very low on the difficulty scale. However, further on in the book, idioms and abstract concepts unfamiliar to young Japanese readers appear; such as "mother tried to slip her own piece of bread onto his plate", and "His face became frighteningly white and pinched." Both phrases occur in the scene describing the terrible poverty the Buckets suffer. As with terms in *Little House on the Prairie*, there may be some lack of background knowledge and experience. However, it would not be a mistake to infer that some lack of understanding would be due to the scope of high school tuition. Take the sentence "He told all the workers that he was sorry, but they would have to go home," for example. In order for the EFL stu-

dent to grasp the meaning, it may have to be put into direct speech or paraphrased as "He told all the workers, 'I am sorry to say that you will all have to go home.'"

By far the most difficult part of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is the language of the songs sung by the Oompa-Loompas when one of the children has done something amiss. Terms discrediting the child such as "revolting", "unutterably vile", "brute", "slop", "repulsive bum", and "brat" are not in the English curriculum. However, the author does make a final plea for both the young readers (and their parents) to read more. This plea is part of the song degrading the child who watches TV all day. It is by far Dahl's longest "song" extending over as many as 108 lines of rhyming, rhythmical verse.

In spite of the difficulties mentioned above, Dahl's writing style often helps with comprehension. He typically uses elements of three: "I'm not going to eat my palace! I'm not even going to nibble the staircase or lick the walls!"³ Dahl also uses short sentences without complex grammar, and thus produces some very lively, vivid descriptions. As Clark (2006) says, brevity facilitates power in a work, creates an opportunity to add wit, and urges the writer to perfect his use of language. This, Dahl has done.

5. On the Appropriateness of Either or Both

If, as Davies suggests, EFL learners are more motivated when they have some background knowledge, then we can presume that modern students in Japan would prefer the latter work. Furthermore, as the story follows how a boy who loves chocolate wins a ticket that will allow him

to visit a nearby chocolate factory, we can imagine that any readers who like to indulge in chocolate will be attracted to the story. Indeed, even when given a choice of assignment topics, all of the students decided to write about *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* for their final assignment, although some chose to compare the English with Naoki Yanase's translation while others chose to compare the movie starring Johnny Depp and the original text.

As mentioned above, it can be extremely difficult to find appropriate authentic material for Japanese learners of English. The two novels mentioned here, however, show that, although there may be some hurdles with language, popular children's literature can show the history and culture of the target language to be learnt, as well as be enjoyable to read, thus promoting motivation and, in so doing, further improving the reading skills of the student.

Notes

1. <https://www.udel.edu/ETL/RWN/ReadingLists.html#contents>
2. <http://littlehouseteachersguides.blogspot.jp/> , < [http://www.cape.k12.mo.us/blanchard/hicks/Reading % 20 Pages / Little % 20 House / Little _ House.htm](http://www.cape.k12.mo.us/blanchard/hicks/Reading%20Pages/Little%20House/LittleHouse.htm)> , and < [http://www.k6.edu.com/3rdgrade/language _ arts / hard-times-on-the-prairie.html](http://www.k6.edu.com/3rdgrade/language_arts/hard-times-on-the-prairie.html)> are but just a small sample
3. Underlining not in original, but to emphasize the point being made.

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Company, 2006

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